

# Community College may not be your child's cheapest option and may actually affect your aid

A recent rise in enrollment at two year colleges is more a reflection of costs than quality. The decision to attend two year schools if planning on a four year education may not be in your child's best interest. We're seeing a rather large increase in two year post-secondary school enrollment locally as well as on a national level. Unfortunately the graduation rates are concerning at many of these two year schools. Locally our two year schools have seen a steady decline in both the two year and three year graduation rates. In the last decade the two year graduation rate at our local community college peaked in 2004 at 14.3% and declined to the lowest rate of 8.4% in 2011, the most recent published rate by the school. The three year rates follow a similar trend. The graduation rates are alarming especially when you compare them to local four year public and private universities.

The costs for many families is the driving factor in choosing a two year school. However financial aid can be significantly reduced for transfer students. One of the concerns we talk to our clients about is the reduction in financial aid for transfer students and why it is important to take this into account when your son or daughter first starts applying to colleges. In addition, transferring from a two year program can be difficult and can result in prolonging one's education. If you take into account the low graduation rates, a high probability of spending six years in school (three years at a two year school and another three years at a four year college), and a significantly diminished financial aid package for transfer students, it starts to become a decision that could be more costly for families. There are a number of factors that come into play in this decision and understanding your expected family contribution and the percentage of need met the schools offer are crucial.



We recently received a letter from one of our clients that had gone through our process and was thanking us for helping her understand the details of this exact scenario. I wanted to share with you some of the letter she wrote so you can see the difference in one family's situation.

*I am not passing along this information to brag (ok, maybe a little to brag!) but to let you know how grateful we are to you for really helping us overcome our fear of reaching high when deciding where to let her apply. As I said, no parent wants to have a child accepted to a school only to have to tell them it is financially impossible. When we heard your presentation it made so much sense that we decided to follow your advice and ignore "sticker prices" and obviously this worked out great for us since we would be paying almost twice as much at a SUNY school, which everybody else was telling us was the best bargain around. As we discussed, I think it is a shame*

*that so many people feel OCC is their best option. (As the financial aid rep at Colgate told me, the \$41,000 per year in grant \$ they were offering her would absolutely not be available to her if she came in as a transfer student after 2 years at OCC.)*

The important thing to remember is that every student's educational needs and every family's financial situation is different but making a financial decision for your child's education based on the sticker price of a school is a mistake and should be avoided. Understanding the financial aid process is critical step in understanding the cost your family will pay for their education.

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